Earth Day Turns 50: 3 Ways You Can Make a Difference This Year

It's safe to say that Earth has seen better days. The 2010s were the hottest decade in recorded history (and 2019 the second-hottest year ever measured). Greenland is melting. Much of Australia was an inferno over the past year. Extreme weather, intensified by the climate crisis, cost the world $150 billion in 2019, and that number will only go up as the effects of the crisis deepen.

But back on April 22, 1970, things looked pretty bleak too. (How bleak? A polluted Ohio river had just caught on fire. Yes, a *river* was on *FIRE*.) On that day 50 years ago, 20 million Americans took to the street to demand clean water, clean air, and a clean environment—and it worked! The first Earth Day kick-started the environmental movement. And now every April 22 is a global day of action.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, let's remember how much we can get done when we all work together to make the world a better place. The climate is in crisis, but here are three things we can do to help.

1. Support the Youth-Led Climate Movement

Young people are leading the way when it comes to fighting the climate crisis.

Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg(Opens in new window) started the Fridays for Future(Opens in new window) climate protest two years ago and has since become an international icon. She and her fellow youth activists have inspired young people all over the globe to demand immediate action from our leaders.

Young people have always been at the forefront of movements making positive change. Last September we saw evidence of this again as the youth-led Global Climate Strike brought millions of people out into the streets in towns and cities around the world. Youth leaders are planning for more climate strikes(Opens in new window) this Earth Day. Join their movement(Opens in new window) and help make this the biggest day of climate action the world has ever seen.

2. Vote Climate

Youth leaders have called out politicians for not treating the climate crisis like a crisis. "Our house is on fire(Opens in new window)," Greta has said, but too many elected officials continue to act as if it's all just business as usual. Some have even mocked(Opens in new window) her(Opens in new window). Some continue to deny(Opens in new window) that climate change is real.

Well, it's real(Opens in new window). And we have no time(Opens in new window) to lose(Opens in new window). If leaders in your town, city, and country don't understand this, then vote them out of office. Vote for politicians who are ready to act right now to:

- Put a price on carbon
- Reduce carbon emissions by at least 45% by 2030
- Transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050
- Stop using coal entirely
- Divest fully from the fossil fuel industry
- Stop deforestation of old-growth tropical forests
- Ensure support for developing countries' mitigation and adaptation

3. Promote Climate Justice

When we talk about the climate crisis, we have to remember that we're talking about people, we're talking about families, neighbors, communities. And the most vulnerable among us are being hit the hardest(Opens in new window).

Wealthy countries created this problem, but the least-developed nations are paying the price(Opens in new window). And while it may be easy to make the connection between the warming climate and rising sea levels that threaten small island nations, for example, other consequences are not so clear. Did you know that the refugee crisis(Opens in new window) is being exacerbated by the rapidly changing climate?

The challenge we're facing is about more than climate change. It's about climate justice(Opens in new window). So as we work toward solutions, we must bring frontline, indigenous, and vulnerable communities to the table. We must lift up their voices and *listen*. We need a global green new deal(Opens in new window) that puts equity and justice at the center of the fight against climate change.

Change won't come easily—it never does. But look at what happened 50 years ago! Earth Day 2020 is our chance to make the world a better place. On April 22, millions of people all over the planet will come together to demand action on the climate, and we won't give up and we won't quiet down. We stand united, and we will change the world.

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